

Hebrews

Part 2 - The other world we're living in

Part 1 ended with the statement that “all we need do is trust Jesus and he will make the world we're now living in with him our reality. And this, for the author of Hebrews, was what he so desperately wanted his people to see.”

The point being that both we and the Christians in Hebrews CAN see the world we're living in with Jesus, because it was Jesus himself who said back in **John 17:24**, “Father, I want those you gave me **to be with me right where I am.**” So of course that world can become real to us, and to the Christians in Hebrews, when we have Jesus wanting to make it real for us too. And what better way of making it real than actually lifting into his world so we can be right there IN it with him?

But that raises the question: “But HOW can Jesus lift us into his world with him?” Fortunately, Jesus answers that for us when next he prays in **verse 24** that we can “SEE the glory and the splendour” his Father has given him. Somehow, then, we're given the ability to “see” the world Jesus is in. But how is that possible? Well, Jesus answers that in **verse 24 as well**, when he **describes** the glory the Father has given him as being **loved by the Father** “long before there ever was a world.”

What Jesus wanted his disciples to see, therefore, was his Father's love for him, because that's what makes his world so glorious. But why does Jesus want us to see that? Because that's the world **we LOST the chance to see** in Genesis. We were given the chance in the Garden of Eden to see the glory of the Father's love, and be drawn into his and the Son's glorious world of love with them. But we wanted to create our own world instead, meaning, **verse 25**, that “the world has never known” the Father - or experienced the glory of his love either.

For thousands of years, then, we've been staggering around in a world of our own creation totally blind to what God created us for. But the Father very kindly solved that for us by sending his Son “**to make himself known** (again).” And this is what Jesus' disciples in all ages cotton onto: We know it was God the Father who sent Jesus, **verse 25** - BUT, more important still, we know **why** the Father sent him.

The reason Jesus made his Father known - and “continues to make him known,” **verse 26** - is this: It’s “**in order that the love you (Father) have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.**”

Jesus is making his Father known to us, because if we can know the Father like he knows the Father **that’s how we’re lifted into his world with him** and it becomes real to us. But specifically it’s about knowing the Father’s love, because Jesus has lived in the Father’s love forever, and in his mind that’s what makes his world so glorious. His one great wish, then, is that we enter his world to experience the Father’s love too. And to make that possible was what the Father sent him for.

This was their goal from the very beginning too. When humans came along in Genesis the plan was to include us in their world. And that goal has never changed, because here’s Jesus in John 17 praying to the Father, “Can you bring them into our world, Father, by you loving them as you love me, so that **what I’ve always experienced with you can be their experience too.**”

And for the next thirty years after Jesus’ resurrection this is what those Christians in Hebrews could have been experiencing as well, but they weren’t. And that was deeply concerning to their pastor, because what was their Christian life all about instead if they’d lost sight already of what the Father had sent Jesus for?

But how could he get their eyes off all the stresses and distractions of this world and onto the glorious world the Father had sent Jesus to open up to them? How could he capture their imagination, that the world humanity had lost out on in the Garden of Eden was now being restored and put back into operation again? It clearly meant getting their minds back to what Jesus had been sent by the Father for, but how on earth could he do that?

Well, that wasn’t the author of Hebrews’ job, it was the Holy Spirit’s job, so let’s see how the Holy Spirit went about it.

And it’s clear right off the bat that there was urgency from the Spirit here, because the author of Hebrews dives right in without any opening greetings like Paul does in his letters. The opening statements in Hebrews are also typical of a skilled Greek orator, so this was more like a sermon with serious intent. It’s for a congregation who are flying way under what Jesus prayed for, and they needed waking up.

It's interesting, then, what the author of Hebrews zooms in on first: It's pinning down **who Jesus is**. But rather than using the name "Jesus," he uses the term "Son" in **Hebrews 1:2**, which ties in very nicely with Jesus' prayer in John 17, because what makes the world Jesus is living in so glorious and splendid is **being the Father's Son**.

But why is it so important that he's the Father's Son? Because being a Son means he can "make known" the Father to us. And that's important, because like Jesus said in John 17, it's **knowing** the Father that lifts us into the glorious world of Jesus' experience with him.

Which explains why **Hebrews 1:2** dives right in with "in these last days **God has spoken to us by his Son**," because it's God's Son who is in the best position of all to reveal his Father to us.

And as humans we **need** the Son to reveal the Father to us, because when Moses wanted God to reveal himself to him in **Exodus 33:20** God told him in no uncertain terms that "no one may see me and live," and in **John 1:18** Jesus said, "No human has ever seen God." So we're stuck, and so is God, because how can we ever come to know what God is truly like if he can't show himself to us or speak to us personally - or - if we do happen to catch sight of him we're dead? But it's only by really knowing the Father and the Father's love that lifts us out of our slump and mess in this world, and into the glory and splendour of his world.

So this was the dilemma faced by the author of Hebrews, because he knew the only way out of their slump in the church was to give them a wonderful and very real picture of the Father. But how could he provide such a picture when he hadn't seen the Father either? The answer, fortunately, was simple: **The Father himself had provided the perfect picture**. He had that lovely SON of his, who pictured him in every way, and he'd sent his Son to us as a human like ourselves to show us. His Son was still God, oh yes, but without all that dazzling glory stuff that would melt us on the spot.

So knowing God has a Son really helps. It means we have someone who knows God inside out, who is therefore perfectly qualified to represent God and **speak for him**, which is exactly what Jesus did when he was here as an earthling. And when you realize that's what God sent him for, then we've just cottoned on to the greatest clue in the universe as to how God set things up so we can see him as he is without us being fried to a crisp.

And in seeing him as he is **that's our ticket to his world**, the very thing Jesus prayed for in John 17.

It is armed with this simple but marvellous clue that the author of Hebrews now uses the best Greek he knows to bring it to life. So he starts off by recalling what his fellow Jews **already** knew to be true about God speaking to and through humans, because he'd done it so many times already throughout their Israelite history.

They'd have no trouble accepting the opening statement in Hebrews, therefore, that **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways."** They also knew **why** God had spoken that way too, because every time God had something to say to them through a prophet it was always for their ultimate benefit. Some of the things God said weren't all that pleasant, and some were downright scary, but he always promised good results when people believed it was **he, God, who was speaking** to them, and they listened.

And the Jewish Christians in Hebrews knew that. They knew that God, all through their amazing history, had made contact many times with their ancestors clearly proving he wanted to communicate with them, that he wanted to be involved in the day-to-day events of their lives, and he wanted to show his love for them.

They knew, then, that when God spoke it revealed his love. And he'd done it "lots of times and in all sorts of ways" too, to really prove he loved them. Time and time again he'd sent prophets to encourage them, warn them away from danger, and promise better times ahead. And when in their times of stress they listened to the prophets and they cried out to God for help they got it. So they'd **already** had a glimpse of the glory and splendour of the Father's love. And if they'd listened a lot more attentively to what he was saying through his prophets it would have given them an even better taste of God's love.

But it still would only have been a "taste," because God only spoke through the prophets in bits and pieces. In the great jigsaw puzzle picture of his incredible plan God only gave each prophet a piece or two of the puzzle. Never to any one individual in the Old Testament did God give all the pieces. Several of the prophets openly admitted it too, because they knew God was speaking amazing things through them, but what did it all mean? Even King David, who predicted amazing things about Jesus in the Psalms, never experienced them personally.

What a relief in **Hebrews 1:2**, then, to hear that “**in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son.**” It was a huge relief because it meant that God hadn’t stopped speaking. But for God to speak through his Son - well, that was a huge relief too, because now all pieces of the jigsaw could be put together to reveal the whole glorious picture at last.

But the whole glorious picture of what? Well, the picture Jesus prayed for, of course, that we’d come to know the Father’s love, because that’s how we experience the splendour and glory of God’s world the same way Jesus does.

But why reserve the whole picture of the Father’s love for just his Son to reveal? Because that’s the most loving thing the Father could do FOR US: It was sending his Son, because who better than the Son to do the revealing, and especially when you look at his Son’s **qualifications?**

Which is exactly what the author of Hebrews focuses on next: he focuses on the obvious fact that God’s Son is the most qualified one to help us grasp the Father’s love, because the Father “**appointed him heir of all things,**” **verse 2**. So Jesus certainly knows what it’s like to be loved by the Father, because the Father promised the whole world to him as his inheritance. He knows the Father’s love better than anyone, therefore, but especially in the Father making him heir of all things, because the “**all things**” **included us**. And that’s what Jesus was after, it was us, and the Father knew that, so he’s given his Son what his Son wanted more than anything, the chance to lift us into the world he’d inherited so we could experience the Father’s love too.

So if I’m down in the dumps in my Christian life, and it’s all a bit of a puzzle still, I have this reminder in Hebrews that the Father put me in the loving care of his Son - and the same Son, by the way, “**through whom God made the universe,**” **verse 2**. So here’s another sure way the Son knows his Father’s love, because the Father also gave him the joy of bringing this entire creation into existence. But best of all in that creation was the chance for his Son to CREATE US. That was his Father’s greatest gift to him. It’s hard to believe that we are the Father’s greatest gift to his Son, but it means we have someone on our side who utterly loves us and knows exactly how to help us.

So when the author of Hebrews says “God is speaking to us by his Son,” it’s to help us see **who we’ve got in his Son**. And seeing it in two ways too: who his Son is to the FATHER, and who his Son is to US.

Who the Son is to the Father is summarized beautifully in **verse 3**: **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”** Imagine a human father saying that of his child, that **“You’re everything I could ever hope a child of mine to be, because you radiate and glow with everything I am and believe in and stand for. I am so, so proud of you, and my heart is close to bursting because I love you so much.”**

Can we see the Son, then, as the Father sees him? Because that’s clearly the Holy Spirit’s purpose here in Hebrews, to lift the eyes of those Christians to what’s going on in God’s world, because that’s the world that Jesus **prayed** for his disciples to see. And it starts with seeing the Father’s immense love for his Son, because that’s God telling us how great his Son is to him. But what is that saying to us?

Well, if the Son is that great to his Father, and the Father loves him and trusts him with everything in his creation, **including us**, then look what **WE’VE** got in his Son too. The Father couldn’t have given **US** a greater gift either. So when the author of Hebrews says next in **verse 3**, that the Son is also **“sustaining all things by his powerful word,”** this is who we’ve got sustaining **US**.

I read the other day that if you look at a night sky through a drinking straw you’re actually looking at 10,000 galaxies in the hole at the far end of the straw. Move the straw an inch to the left and that’s another 10,000 galaxies you’re looking at, and an inch to the left again, another 10,000. Well, the sustainer of that lot is **our** Sustainer too.

So can we hear God speaking that to us, that the Son he’s given to us has the power in just his **“word”** to sustain billions of galaxies? And that being the case, then what have we got to worry about in what’s happening to us down here?

So if I’m struggling at times, just like those Hebrew Christians, with why Christianity isn’t more fulfilling and joy-filled, or why God is letting me suffer and he won’t heal me, or why I keep feeling there’s something missing, or why all my efforts at being a good person aren’t having much effect on people - can I hear God telling me, **“But I gave you the radiance of my glory pouring out from my Son into every nook and cranny of the universe - including you in your little dark corner of misery - to provide you by his simple word with whatever you need to sustain you, so you never need worry about anything”?**

Because this was God's answer to those Christians in Hebrews, whose world was caving in on them. Some of them had lost their jobs and property already as the culture turned against them, just as people in our culture are turning more and more against Christianity today. So why does God let it happen? Why doesn't he protect us? And why was he letting Christians back in Hebrews die some pretty horrible deaths too? It was all very worrying and very confusing. So rather than God's world becoming more real to them, it had all become rather vague.

So surely this would have been a good time for God to speak through miracles and healings again, just like he did through Jesus before, right? But here they were, thirty years down the road since Jesus had been raised from the dead, and the miracles and healings had eased off considerably.

So if God wasn't speaking through his Son doing miracles and healings, how and what was he speaking through his Son instead?

Well, this is where Hebrews comes to our rescue again, because it talks of a "new and living way" enabling us to "draw near to God." It's still God speaking through his Son, but this time it's getting us to focus on who his Son is to him, and who his Son is to us. And it's all very PERSONAL. It's how personal the Son is to the Father and how personal the Son is to us. This isn't about miracles and healings anymore. That's not how we enter the reality of Jesus' world with him. Instead, it's knowing the enormous love the Father has for his Son, and knowing that he's given the Son he loves so much to us, so that we can personally experience their love too. And that's how we enter their world, and how Jesus' prayer in John 17 is being answered.

So when God speaks about his Son's greatness in these first few verses in Hebrews, what we're hearing is the Father's deep love for his Son. This is his Son to whom he's given everything, because his Son is everything the Father believes in and stands for and loves. And that's the picture we're given first.

The author of Hebrews then takes that picture of how great the Son is in his Father's eyes and in just one sentence in **verse 3** he makes the Son so personal to US, because it's the Son who "**provided purification for sins.**" Now it gets personal for us, because this step had to be taken too, to enable us to "draw near to God." No way could we enter the glory and splendour of God's world without the Son doing this for us.

So what was this sin we needed purifying or cleansing from? It was our flippancy about what God was offering us. In Genesis God planted a Tree of Life, the fruit of which when eaten would have given Adam and Eve life forever in God's world "as one of them" (Genesis 3:22), which is exactly what Jesus prayed for in John 17. So they had the chance right off the bat in Genesis to enter and experience the glory and splendour of God's world, and live in the Father's love just like Jesus always had.

But they turned it down. So they lost out on the chance to know the Father's love. They never knew what it was like to live in his world, of being loved by the Father and loving him in return. It was a tragedy, because humans from this point on were no better off than the animals. Animals have no awareness of God as love or as a loving Father, and nor after the Garden of Eden did we. God left us with our brilliant minds, yes, but it only made us into clever animals, because we were still stuck in this dimension with no understanding of God's dimension or any way of entering it.

And this is what the Christians in Hebrews were in danger of falling back into - just like any Christian since who's become disillusioned with Christianity because of the awful picture Christians have given of God, or because it feels like God doesn't care - so they too were becoming flippant about what God was offering them.

The author of Hebrews reminds them, therefore, that God through his Son had cleansed them of all that had separated them from experiencing the Father's love. They were now free to enter his world again, as if they were back in Genesis all over again. What Jesus prayed for in John 17, therefore, was exactly what God was now speaking to them in Hebrews as being possible - because of his Son cleansing them.

So what did Jesus say again in John 17? He prayed in verses 24-26, "Can you bring them into our world, Father, by you loving them as you love me, so that **what I've always experienced with you can be their experience too.**"

Jesus is talking about a whole different world opening up where we'll see the Father's love. But how do we see the Father's love? Well, it's being explained in these verses in Hebrews, because they speak of God giving his Son to us and giving us to his Son. And it's clear from who the Son is that the Father could do no more loving or greater thing for us than that.

The Father knows his Son totally loves us, because he created us and we are his inheritance, meaning we are everything to his Son. So in his love for us and his Son the Father has given us to his Son to care for and love for eternity, starting in our lives right now. That's the opportunity now facing us every day, so that we're already being drawn into their world of love too.

And that's what those Hebrew Christians were being reminded of, the amazing opportunity the disciples of Jesus have been given of knowing what the Father sent Jesus for. He sent Jesus to lift us into their world, meaning we can totally trust Jesus to do that for us any time this world is overwhelming us. We can rely on him to lift our eyes to the world of love we're really living in, so that we never need to feel disillusioned or discouraged again. In other words, "all we need do is trust Jesus and he will make the world we're now living in with him our reality."

This, then, is what these first verses in Hebrews were designed by the Holy Spirit to do. They were, and still are, just what is needed to lift disillusioned, distracted, empty-feeling Christians out of a slump, by making the other world we're living in more real. But, if it's still not that real yet from these verses, no problem, we've still got 11 more verses in chapter one and 12 more chapters in Hebrews to go yet...